# Cigars: Not a Harmless Fad

**FAST FACTS:**

- **Smoking just one large cigar could produce the same hazardous health effects as smoking a pack of cigarettes.**
- **The secondhand smoke from cigars is more poisonous than the secondhand smoke from cigarettes.**
- **Cigar smokers absorb nicotine regardless of whether or not they inhale.**

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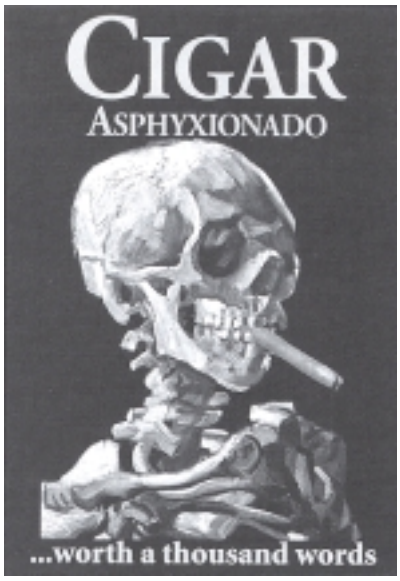
## Prevalence

Who smokes cigars? In 1998, 5.9 percent of adult Californians had smoked cigars in the last 30 days. While 9.8 percent of adult men reported smoking cigars, 2.0 percent of adult women smoked them. However, estimates of cigar smoking prevalence are as high as 17.2 percent for white males between the ages of 18 to 24 years.[1]

Cigar smoking—identified by the cigar industry as an "adult custom"—is also a practice of some California teens. In a 1998 telephone survey of youth in California, 5.1 percent of males and 3.2 percent of females between the ages of 12 to 17 reported smoking a cigar in the last 30 days. White males (10.9%) and white females (8.5%) have the highest cigar smoking prevalence in the 12- to 17-year-old group.[1]




## Health Impacts

Tobacco use, whether cigarettes, cigars, or smokeless tobacco, causes almost twice as many strokes, heart attacks, and other cardiovascular diseases than it does lung cancer. This is because the nicotine in tobacco causes the blood vessels to constrict and create changes in the bloodstream which promote clogging of the arteries. At the same time, nicotine causes the heart to pump blood faster. Cigar smokers absorb nicotine regardless of whether or not they inhale because cigars are mildly alkaline, which means nicotine is easily absorbed through the mouth and lips. Nicotine from cigarettes, however, is absorbed by inhaling.[2,3,4]

Cigars are potent nicotine delivery devices. Cigars can contain up to 70 times as much nicotine as cigarettes. Smoking just one large cigar could produce the same hazardous health effects as smoking a pack of cigarettes. Even just holding an unlit cigar in the mouth could enable nicotine absorption.[5]

The secondhand smoke from cigars is more poisonous than the secondhand smoke from cigarettes. Emissions from one cigar exceed those from three cigarettes. In fact, a burning cigar emits up to 25 times the amount of carbon monoxide—the potentially deadly gas in car exhaust—as emitted by one cigarette.[6]

## A Safe Alternative?

Studies show that:

- Cigar smokers have a 4 to 10 times higher risk of dying from laryngeal, oral and esophageal cancers than nonsmokers.[7]
- Men who smoke 5 or more cigars per day are 2 to 3 times more likely to die of lung cancer than nonsmokers. Risk for lung cancer increases with both the amount smoked and the depth of inhalation.[8]
- Cigar smokers are up to 3.6 times more likely to die from from chronic obstructive lung disease (emphysema) than are nonsmokers.[9]

Cigars are not a safe alternative to cigarettes. For those who switch to cigars from cigarettes, the risk of dying from lung cancer is 51 percent higher than cigar smokers who have never used cigarettes, 68 percent higher than lifetime nonsmokers, and 57 percent higher than those who have not smoked any tobacco products for 20 years or more.[10,11]

## A Fad Today—Increased Death Rates Tomorrow?

Following a steady decline in cigar consumption over the previous 30 years in the United States, the cigar industry's savvy marketing revived this once languishing industry. Total cigar consumption more than doubled, from 2.1 billion in 1993 to 4.5 billion in 1996.[12,13] The cigar industry also experienced a dramatic increase in cigar sales and revenue from 1996 to 1997. Aggregate sales of the five largest manufacturers increased 15 percent and dollar sales of cigars, based on wholesale price, increased 43 percent during this period. Directly related were the 32 percent increase in total advertising and promotional expenditures for cigars and the 54 percent increase in number of cigar brands marketed by the industry.[14]

Cigars can be addictive, and one cigar industry executive readily admits it. Commenting on the cigar trend, Carlo Franzblau, vice president of marketing for Thompson & Company, believes that once the cigar craze is over, his company will end up with more customers than it had previously because new consumers trying cigars for the first time will become hooked. "So for the net long term, the cigar fad is good for the business."[15]

Although consumption rates for cigars are still increasing, data compiled by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Bureau of the Census and the Agricultural Marketing Service of the United States Department of Agriculture show that the rate of increase is on the decline. The less than 2% increase in consumption nationally for 1999 is a vast improvement over the 19% and 16% increases, respectively for 1996 and 1997.[16]

Additionally, agreements between the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the seven largest U.S. cigar companies, comprising about 95 percent of the U.S. cigar market, established the first national requirements for health warnings on cigar products. Effective by mid-January 2001, these requirements mandate that manufacturers display, clearly and conspicuously, one of 5 rotational warnings on every cigar package, advertisement, or utilitarian item depicting the serious health risks of cigar smoking. [17]

## References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